

IN 233 THE ETHNIC MUSEUMS OF CHICAGO: CULTURAL HISTORIES

Welcome! This faculty-designed independent study offers students an opportunity to explore and utilize some of the fascinating ethnic museums in Chicago! Some are devoted to Polish, Irish, Jewish, Mexican, and African-American culture. Also, ask about museums devoted to American Indian, Chinese, Lithuanian, and other cultures.

Students, on their own or with friends, will visit the DuSable Museum of African-American History, the Mexican Fine Arts Center, the Polish Museum of America, and treat them each as a learning experience. Students will be encouraged to take advantage, when available, of their talks, classes, special exhibits, workshops, and community events.

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A-1-B: Can use public or private institutions as resources for exploring arts and ideas.

H-2-B: Can use public or private institutions as resources for understanding a social issue.

The first thing to do is to get a notebook that you feel comfortable in writing in and keeping notes in. This will be your course journal. With your work in this journal you will demonstrate your learning and mastery of your competencies. Then get a folder in which to keep handouts, reading lists, pamphlets, etc. that you pick up at the ethnic museums.

Before you visit each museum, call them and double-check the hours for that day and any special talks or particular events that you could take advantage of that day. Inquire about free days and student discounts. Ask about parking and bus and train information.

Here's how to find out how to get around by the RTA (Regional Transportation Authority, called the CTA in Chicago): Call 836-7000 from any area code. Tell them where you'll be traveling from, where you'll be traveling to, and at what time. Be sure to allow enough time to have a comfortable visit to each museum, so you'll have time to take a break, absorb what you're seeing and learning, and not be rushing around at closing time looking at the clock.

Ask about books and videos, the gift shop, and any special pamphlets and publications. Ask for the education and/or public information departments, and arrange to take a tour! Keep careful notes of your visits, and let your mind be especially open to anything that grabs your interest: would something be an additional avenue to explore?

The DuSable Museum of African-American History is located in the Hyde Park area, in Washington Park at 740 East 56th Place in Chicago. (773) 947-0600. It is named for Jean-Baptiste Point DuSable, the black Haitian trader who became Chicago's first non-native settler. The museum began in 1961 in the home of Margaret and Charles Burroughs, who wanted people to have a better understanding of black history, art, culture, and both local and world contributions. Be sure to study the paintings, murals, and the collection of dolls, drums jewelry, and African musical instruments. Check out the library, and its posters, handbills, letters, photographs, etc. In the DuSable and in each museum, select some reading material to read and note in your journal. Talk to Joe, the instructor, about assembling reading material for the course that helps fulfill the competencies, speaks to your particular interests, and adds most fittingly to your particular learning experience.

The Mexican Fine Arts Center is located at 1852 W. 19th Street in the Chicago neighborhood called Pilsen. (773) 738-1503. "Pilsen" is the name of a town in Europe, in Bohemia, part of today's Czech Republic. This Chicago neighborhood was formerly the home of thousands of Bohemians and other Czechs—the largest such community in the U.S.A.! The local architecture often still looks Eastern European, and in fact movies and television shows have been filmed in the neighborhood for that reason—one time they just changed the street names to Russian for the movie.

As the Czechs moved to the western suburbs, Mexican-Americans were the next group to come to Pilsen. Today it is one of the largest Mexican neighborhoods in the country. Mexican art frequently features colorful, and often very political murals, or wall paintings (the word comes from the Latin word “mura,” which means “wall.”). Be sure to look around Pilsen and see some of these murals, and don’t miss the outstanding Mexican restaurants in the area. Ask your instructor about some of the beautiful churches as well, including St. Procopius. Today quite a few young artists also live in Pilsen. The Mexican museum is small, and has several new exhibits a year. Be sure to ask about any talks, tours, music, and special events. Talk with your instructor about looking into the art of Rivera, Oroscio, and the great woman artist Kahlo.

The Polish Museum of America is located at 984 N. Milwaukee Avenue in a large Polish area just off the Kennedy Expressway. Speak with your instructor about the magnificent Polish churches in the area, including St. Mary of the Angels, Holy Trinity, and St. Stanislaus Kostka. Before you go, check out a CD in a record store, public library, or the DePaul library of the music of Paderewski (pronounced Pada-REFF-ski). He was an outstanding Polish pianist and composer who became a statesman, and there is a room about him in the museum. See the stained glass window “Poland Reborn,” and check out the religious items, paintings, and folk art. See the memorabilia of Thaddeus Kosciusko, who helped the U.S. win the Revolutionary War. (There is a statue of him just outside the Shedd Aquarium). The library has 60,000 volumes, maps, photographs, filmstrips, and slides. Be sure to ask about a tour, and about any talks, movies, or theater performances.

The Spertus Museum of Judaica is located at 618 S. Michigan Avenue (312-922-9012). The artifacts here span 3,500 years of Jewish history and culture. Do not miss the special exhibits, or the Zell Holocaust Memorial. You can ask about bringing children to the hands-on Artifact Center in which both children and adults can learn about ancient lands the way an archeologist might. Ask about the Israelite House for small children, and inquire about tours and workshops on Sunday and other days.

When you write up your visits in your course journal, please re-read your competencies carefully and write your journal in such a way as to demonstrate understanding and mastery of your competencies. Talk to your instructor about any of this. This DePaul independent study will adhere to university policies on plagiarism and strive to uphold Vincentian ideals. Treat each museum as a fun adventure, and as a tremendous source for new areas of inquiry and new learning. Enjoy, and learn a lot!

To sign up, or for any questions, please do not e-mail, but rather call Joe at (773) 728-0357.